

Catholic Church's Pastoral Counseling Role in Addressing Domestic Violence against Women in Marriage in Muranga County, Kenya

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Abstract: *The main purpose of this study was to examine the role of pastoral counseling by the Catholic Church in addressing domestic violence against women in marriage, in Maragua Parish, Murang'a County. Survey research design was used in this study. The main respondents of this study population were the married couples. The target population for this study was 5420 catholic church members. The sample size included 360 married couples from the parish. Random sampling procedure was used to arrive at the sample. The main research instruments used in the study was questionnaire. Quantitative data analysis procedure was used where data were analyzed and reported in frequencies and percentages and summarized using figures and tables. Quantitative analytical software, namely SPSS was used to process the data. The results showed that Catholic church played a critical role in addressing domestic violence against women in marriage through increasing confidence and self-esteem among women. The study also took into account the contribution of the male members of the society, with a call to respect women and help create coexistence in the society. This study informs the role that faith based organizations could play in addressing gender based disparities in society.*

Keywords: *Pastoral Counselling, Catholic Church's role in Addressing Domestic Violence, Violence against women, Women in Marriage*

1.0 Introduction

Domestic violence has been a common problem in most families worldwide, and the problem affects both men and women. It is unfortunate that women in most instances are the worst affected, since they tend to be defenseless and the magnitude of brutality that some of them go through greatly cause them serious physical harm and at times it gets fatal. This problem has been rampant in that civil societies have come up to sensitize the masses on the dangers and harm caused by domestic violence. Despite all the sensitization measures to curb the vice, there have been various barriers and challenges that have slowed the fight against the vice. One of the problems is that most cases of domestic violence go unreported since most victims are often threatened while most of them do so for fear of being stigmatized, and this makes most of the women suffer in silence. In some societies, the violence is seen just as normal cases, and hence seriousness in fighting the vice is not taken seriously.

Sexual violence is one of the issues that make women be more prone to violence. Tjaden & Thoemes, (2010). reported that more women have reported sexual abuse than their male counterparts. According to the UK statistics, four out of ten women have experienced violence in one way or another at some point in their lives. In the US, about two million cases of violence against women are reported annually Abrahams & Pearlene (2002). This shows the extent if the problem, where it is a serious global issue that needs to be addressed as an urgent matter. Physical assault is also rampant in most cases. This comes in many forms such as deprivation of liberty, battering, and other abuses that result in physiological harm. Most of the abuses on women are caused by their male partners, either in marriage or at workplaces.

Inter-American Development Bank reported in 1999 that domestic violence affects not only families but also the economic growth of a country, as more money is channeled to handle cases such as healthcare, court cost police, etc., leading to financial losses Abrahams & Pearlene (2002). Other side effects of violence result in loss of lives among most women due to depression and harms from physical or physiological abuses (USAID, 2006).

In Kenya, most of the domestic abuses are reported in married couples. It also affected by socio-cultural and religious backgrounds. According to the Kenya Demographic and health survey (KDHS), almost half of all women in Kenya have experienced some form of domestic violence since the age of 15 years. Different communities in Kenya handle domestic violence differently Kimuna & Djamba (2008). With regards to the Kikuyu culture, where this study was conducted, men are regarded as household heads and their roles in a family setup are well defined, these roles have over time allowed them to command respect within the larger community. Women, on the other hand, have their roles in a family setup, according to the Kikuyu customs, they are expected to be submissive to their husbands and on most occasions in the past, they were not allowed to participate in major decision-making processes and they were also limited to take up leadership roles in positions that were regarded as critical and involved major decision making within the community. Their major roles involved attending to the family's domestic chores and actively being involved in other lighter duties in a home. In case of the demise of the house-hold head, the eldest son would take over the fathers roles as the leader of the family.

Like other places in the country and around the world, domestic violence is rampant in Murang'a County and among the Agikuyu community. Women are the most affected victims of domestic abuse such as battering, rape, psychological and emotional abuse and limited participation in elective leadership positions. In Maragua Sub County specifically, there were about 500 reported cases of domestic violence, of which 480 cases were violence against women, this was according to the department of Gender in Murang'a County.

Despite the rampant cases, various remedies to violence against women have been suggested. The church, being one of the most important domestic pillars in the Murang'a County, plays an important role in fighting against domestic violence. The church in Kenya is aimed not to bring separation, by trying to solve the disputes through arbitration, and not solve by encouraging the abused party to move away as this is seen as encouraging separation. However, the Catholic church bishops in the US advises that if a person is domestically violated in a marriage, they can

move away, especially through formal means by seeking a divorce. They argue that violence and abuse are the main cause of marriage break up, but not the divorce (Coomaraswamy, 2005).

Therefore, the church teachings act play important role in reconciling warring domestic parties. This ensures that violence cases are handled without causing further damages to the parties. Pope Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, (2002), acknowledged that domestic violence exists even in believers of the word of God and also in churches. However, he argued that where love prevails, the issue of domestic violence against women can be avoided and have an everlasting bond between husbands, wives and children. Churches in general, have a critical role to play in addressing domestic related violence. This study intended to examine the pastoral counselling role of the Catholic Church in addressing domestic violence against women in the context of Maragua Parish in Murang'a County, Kenya.

2.0 Methodology

The researcher used a survey research design to determine the role of pastoral counselling by the Catholic Church in addressing domestic violence in Maragua Parish. In the descriptive study, this study sought to establish how couples perceive the Catholic Church's pastoral counseling role in addressing Domestic Violence against women in marriage. Other methods used in the study included use of researchers observation guide, data from primary and secondary sources. Survey research design was most appropriate because it secures evidence and describes situations the way they are thus helping to determine the necessary steps to be taken in order to effectively identify the pastoral counselling role played by the Catholic Church in addressing the vice of domestic violence. This research design was also preferred for this study because it explored in-depth the role of pastoral counselling role in addressing domestic violence specifically among Catholic couples.

The sample size for the study was 360, which was drawn from a target population of 5420 church members and leaders from 13 local churches in Maragua parish. Married respondents aged between 18- to 55 and above from Maragua parish as provided by the parish headquarters.

The study used questionnaire as the main data collection instruments. The researcher administered a structured questionnaire with open and closed ended questions. In closed ended questions, response categories were provided and respondents only needed to select a particular answer or answers. The questionnaires targeted the married church members and those with information about domestic violence. Questionnaires were the most convenient data collection instruments since they targeted a large number of respondents, and hence widening the scope of data collection from variety of the respondents within the parish. The researcher opted for this data collection tool due to its cost-efficiency; practicability; speedy results and accurate scientific analysis and prediction. This makes it saves time and other resources such as money, and human effort. The questionnaires are easy to understand as it is presumed that the research has targeted only the literate respondents.

3.0 Results

3.1 Demographic Information

With regards to age, nearly half (46%) of the respondents were between the age of 26 to 35 years, while nearly a third (27%) of the respondents were between the age of 18 to 25 years. From the results analyzed, these two categories of respondents also experienced high number of domestic violence among couples. Respondents in young marriages were more likely to experience domestic violence and thus this age bracket was at a higher risk of experiencing cases of domestic violence.

Nearly half (43%) of the respondents had secondary school level of education, while 25% of them had basic primary school education. It was clear that the local community has embraced education as a measure of social growth and mobility as evidenced from respondent with tertiary (17%), graduate (5%) and post-graduate (10%) academic qualifications.

Respondents with a strong Catholic background and upbringing were practicing the religions tenets and principles, and they were very co-operative in terms of providing in-depth and comprehensive information on the research topic.

It was also observed that most of the respondents who confirmed to be members of small christian community groups were effectively addressing and practicing the church's teachings. This helped the couples to understand better other effective ways of addressing domestic quarrels and misunderstanding among couples just like the Catholic church requires them to.

3.2 Catholic Church's Pastoral Counseling Role in Addressing Domestic Violence

The Catholic Church has been effective in laying the groundwork of reducing violence against women. A programme of action which entails a plan to reduce violence against women and children globally has been put in place (Brady, 2014). The social services arm of the Catholic Church has put up a secretariat charged with the mandate of ensuring reduced cases of violence against women. All countries whereby the Catholic Church has a presence have the benefit of having active programs geared towards reduction of violence against women.

According to Brady (2014), Church programmes that address domestic violence cases have been proven to accord faithfals with skills and knowledge on how to better solve the issue of domestic related violence. Instances of reduced cases of violence against women have been reported in Eastern Europe and Australia occasioned by the undertaken activities. The study sought to find out the actual teachings undertaken by the Catholic Church in Maragua parish. Table 1 shows the Catholics' Church pastoral counseling role in addressing domestic violence against women.

Table 1
 Role of pastoral counseling in addressing domestic violence against women

Items	SD		D		UD		A		SA	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Pre-marital counseling programs carried out by the catholic church play a great role in addressing violence against women after marriage	-	30	80	34	19	-	40	-	31	-
The spiritual groups of YACA, CWA and SMA help cultivate respect and goodwill in the households reducing cases of domestic violence	-	20	-	40	51	4	-	100	70	-
Pastoral visits to the homes of parishioners helped reduce the cases of domestic violence in the parish	-	54	-	-	130	10	7	-	60	-
Marital counseling programs in the catholic church facilitates the reduction of violence against women	-	30	-	-	27	34	17	10	87	-
Appreciation of biblical teachings exalting the position of women reduces cases of violence in the households	-	20	-	-	-	34	100	10	131	-

Premarital counseling programme carried out by the Catholic Church did not play a great role in addressing violence against women after marriage. This was the position taken by most of the respondents during the study. It was an indication that despite the presence of premarital counseling programs geared towards equipping couples before they engaged in marital union, the practices of domestic violence still abound. It was an indication that the premarital counseling programs played an insignificant role in terms of facilitating the newly wedded couples not to engage in domestic violence once they settled in the marital union. It can thus be interpreted to mean that the premarital counseling programs had not realized the intended objectives of having harmonious coexistence in the households. Despite the premarital counseling programs by

parishioners who had engaged in holy matrimony, cases of domestic violence were still evident in the local community.

Some of the respondents were of the view that premarital counseling programs carried out by the church had aided address cases of domestic violence in the households. The responses were a pointer to some couples greatly benefitting from the premarital counseling services provided to them at the advent of their marriages. It was an indication that some parishioners had evidence of households which had held together and greatly benefitted from the premarital counseling services programs. It can thus be interpreted to mean that some membership of the parish had derived benefits from the counseling services provided to them and this had facilitated harmonious coexistence and reduction of domestic violence cases in the community.

The findings by the study confirmed the position taken by Kimuna & Djamba (2008) who was of the view that often the Local Church of Kenya forms supportive groups to cater for the people's special needs in the Small Christian Communities. In the same breath, retroactive validation of marriage is a supportive means to persons wishing to enter into a fuller communion with the church by teaching them quality family life. Use of couple's power among parishes, sensitizing youth groups through inviting successful couples to talk to them, providing guidance and accompaniment to the couples after marriage also helps reduce cases of domestic violence among the church members. Proper formation of unmarried people planning to marry is equally a premise for harmonious marriages.

Most of the respondents were of the view that spiritual groups of Young Adults Catholic Association, Catholic Women Association and Catholic Men Association helped cultivate respect in the households reducing cases of domestic violence. The responses were a pointer to the situation whereby membership in the spiritual groups was viewed as an avenue of cultivating goodwill and mutual relations between the members. It was an indicator that the spiritual groups fostered cohesion among the members and individuals subscribing to the ideals of the spiritual groups strived to leave an indelible mark imprinted on the livelihoods of each other based on the association. The members thus worked towards being good examples and role models among their peers. This aspect played a very significant role in terms of deterring cases of domestic violence in the membership of the spiritual groups. It can thus be interpreted to mean that membership in the spiritual groups had a significant role in terms of reducing cases of domestic violence against women. The Small Christian Communities in Maragua Parish comprise of parishioners who frequently meet and discuss the catholic churches' teachings.

A very significant percentage of the respondents were of the view that membership into the spiritual groups had done little in terms of helping cultivate respect and goodwill in the households to the extent of reducing cases of domestic violence. The responses were reflective of a situation whereby there were known cases of domestic violence in the community perpetuated by individuals who were members of the spiritual groups in the church. It can thus be interpreted to mean that despite membership in the spiritual groups some parishioners still engaged in domestic violence. Some insignificant numbers of the respondents were undecided on the

attribute of spiritual groups helping cultivate respect and goodwill to the extent of helping reduce cases of domestic violence.

Pastoral visits to the homes of the members of the parish had helped reduce the cases of domestic violence. This was confirmed by most of the respondents who affirmed to the position. It was a testament to the fact that the priests engaged in pastoral visits to the homes of the parish members. It was a pointer to the fact that specific time was dedicated to engage in visitation practices to the homes of the parishioners by the priests to foster mutual interaction beyond the confines of the churches. It can thus be interpreted to mean that the priests dedicated time and reached out to the parishioners. This was with an aim of seeking to engage them at their homes and get to experience firsthand the challenges that they encountered and equally share with them on issues of life. The visits had a positive impact in terms of forestalling occurrence of domestic violence in the households.

Most of the respondents confirmed that pastoral counseling programs in the Catholic Church facilitated the reduction of violence against women. The responses vindicated the church as regards the capacity to dutifully engage the members in the activities geared towards building and strengthening the family units with an aim of reducing the domestic violence cases. This vindicated the church as regards the resolve and capacity to have proactive measures aimed at ensuring improved livelihoods of the membership and guarding against domestic violence. It can thus be interpreted to mean that the marital counseling programs in place had helped reduce the cases of domestic violence in the parish among the church members.

4.0 Discussion

From the study results, there was high rates of prevalence of domestic violence against women among the Catholic Church faithfuls of between 18-35 years. These category of married parishioners recorded higher cases of domestic violence due to a number of reasons including failure of using pastoral counselling as a way of settling family quarrels and communication challenges. Very few individuals indicated that they have never experienced first-hand domestic violence cases. One of the reasons that contributed to these cases of domestic violence was mainly alcoholism and substance abuse. Most women who have experienced domestic violence first hand stated frustrations from their spouses, and indicated that men have generally abandoned their duties and responsibilities in their respective families. This in turn has resulted to women going an extra mile to fend and provide all basic needs a family might require. The cases of abuse of women are also rampant in other places as (Clark, Everson-Rose, Alonso, Spencer, Brady, Resnick, & Suglia, (2014) argued that in South Africa, couples who entered into marriage unions traditionally that had no religious backing that would effectively help mentor couples to sort out their domestic violence experienced frequent domestic violence.

The role of pastoral counseling by the church in addressing violence against women came out clearly as most respondents were in agreement that the Catholic Church's structures have provisions that allow for effective domestic issues to be solved amicably. Pastoral counseling on violence against women has been a tool that the church has devised to discourage the vice. The

church spreads the message of love in its teachings to the believers for instance through the senior youth groups, Catholic Women associations, Catholic Men Associations, The PMCs, Charismatic groups and other affiliated groups that comprise of different groups of parishioners. However, most of the respondent's view that lack of active participation by parishioners has equally affected the progress of addressing the challenge of domestic violence among women (Chebogut, & Ngeno, 2010). Despite this, the church still holds a significant role in addressing the gender violence against the women. There are strategies that can be put to address domestic violence against women in Maragua parish by advocating and empowering teachings against domestic violence. The response from the respondents was positive since they have hope in the church and have affirmed confidence on the role the church is playing in discouraging violence against women.

5.0 Conclusions

The Catholic Church has been effective in laying the groundwork of reducing violence against women. A programme of action which entails a plan to reduce violence against women and children globally has been put in place. Responses on effectiveness of the pastoral counseling programs in addressing gender based violence shows that most of the respondents (44%) were of the view that the pastoral counseling programs carried out were not effective in addressing gender based violence. The response stemmed from the fact that most of the respondents considered the effectiveness of the pastoral counseling programs to have been low. Who was of the view that the application of the golden rule as a human pedagogy becomes a paradigm of understanding the word of God by building confidence, familiarity and dignity of human person, created in the image of God, committed to intellectual and spiritual formation and destined to eternal union with God. The Catholic Church should constantly encourage enrollment and active participation of parishioners in groups such as the Small Christian Communities, Charismatic groups, CMA, CWA and the rest as a way of effectively offering pastoral counselling to the different target groups right from the young adults onwards. It is through this active participation by the church that virtues such as love, tolerance in marriage and effective communication can be inculcated among Catholic members in Murang'a Parish as a prerequisite for harmonious coexistence in respective family setups.

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